

The "Sokal Hoax" and a Movement Towards a Clarity of Expression in Leftist Writing

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Michael Apple is the author or co-author of more than 25 books and numerous academic and professional articles. This paper is an attempt to not only gain a better understanding of the "leftist" ideology in educational research by examining one of its most prolific authors, but also to take a hard look at how leftist education literature has "allowed" powerful conservative (or "rightist") coalitions to set the educational agenda in the United States for the next unforeseeable years.

It is possible to list books that read as if they had been written by sausages. Sausage-authors are particularly attracted to words like "hegemon" and its derivatives and they enjoy examining questions from what they term a "realist" or "critical theory perspective." Perhaps more so than books, journals speak to their own professional enclaves. They do nothing to lessen the gap between the humanities and the social sciences, or between the arts and the sciences. Sometimes, indeed, editors gaze wistfully across the intellectual gulfs and seek to transplant blooms from one field into another; but the result, usually, is more incomprehension.

There was a spectacular example of the lack of common understanding in 1996. Many academics find journals just as dull as the general public would, and they often treat them as subjects of satire. The temptation to play jokes on serious-minded editors and their sober following is sometimes irresistible, as happened in the cultural studies journal *Social Text*, an American publication. A mathematical physicist, Adam Sokal, (a committed Leftist) decided to test *Social Text*'s reflexes. Its editors, he believed, were so committed to their own brand of cultural nihilism—of the postmodern variety—that they would swallow any nonsense that seemed to support their point. He cobbled together a number of false propositions, tricked them out in the appropriate postmodernist jargon, asserted that they "proved" that science could not be objective (one of the main tenets of postmodernism) and awaited the result. This infamous hoax may be history, but how much has the culture absorbed? Let's start with a quick quiz. One of the following statements is generally accepted by physicists. The other is a deliberate piece of mushy nonsense. Which is which?

- Henceforth space by itself, and time by itself, are doomed to fade away into mere shadow, and only a kind of union of the two will preserve an independent reality.

- The first homology group of the sphere is trivial, while those of the other surfaces are profound; and this homology is linked with the connectedness or disconnectedness of the surface after one or more cuts. Furthermore, there is an intimate connection between the external structure of the physical world and its inner psychological representation qua knot theory (Brown, 2001, 23).

Did you have trouble picking out the nonsense? So did the luckless editors of *Social Text*, who are still wiping egg off their faces. They accepted Sokal's "*Transgressing the boundaries: Toward a transformative hermeneutics of quantum gravity*" (Sokal, 1996), a concoction of cleverly contrived gibberish written in the worst postmodern jargon. Then Sokal revealed his hoax, to the rage and dismay of the editors of *Social Text* and their following. Though one of the principles of postmodernism is that things are not what they seem, the editors had taken Sokal at face value, perhaps believing that a mathematical physicist was incapable of deception. But he was, and he had demonstrated that any nonsense, seriously presented and clothed in the proper jargon, will do the trick at least in some journals. Although later, Sokal admitted that he was not so much trying to defend science and science methodology from its empty-headed critics as he was hoping to rescue the political Left from a disastrous way of thinking (of the two statements listed above, the first is a generally accepted principle by physicists).

There is no uncontroversial definition of, for example, "social construction," or "relativism," or positivism, or postmodernism; not even "Left and Right." But rough definitions might be useful. To say that knowledge is a *social construction* is to say that it is the product of various social factors and not the result of an objective investigation into how things are independent of our social interests. But there is more to it than just belief—there are no objective facts of the matter to be discovered, according to constructivists.

Relativism is related to social construction and often taken to be a consequence of it. It says that knowledge is tied to a group or society ("Polygamy is morally proper for them, but wrong for us." "The Big Bang is factually true for us, but for them the world started in a different way, and they're correct, too."). There is no moral right or wrong, no factual truth or falsehood over and above what is accepted by a particular society.

The *Left-Right* dichotomy stems from the French Revolution, when the more progressive members of the National Assembly sat on the left while their opponents were seated on the right. The terms have stuck and are used in a common, though loose, fashion throughout the world. Leftists today would often include opposition to racism, opposition to sexism, pro-environmentalism, and anti-war activism as being on the Left. But if there is one characteristic that is essential and over-riding, it is the desire for greater economic equality. Where opinions differ is over how much equality and how it should be achieved. Opinions further divide over the relation between economic issues and others. Marx took all social problems to be at root economic. Many current Leftists think that, contrary to Marx, racism and sexism have a life of their own; they are independent of economic factors and must be combated separately. And the work of Michael Apple falls decidedly on the left side of the political/educational spectrum: "While there may occasionally be problems with the traditional categories of 'left and right,' in sorting through the complexities of politics on the ground of all our nations, I consciously and without apology position myself on the left" (Apple, 2001a, 8).

The spectrum of opinion on the Right is perhaps even wider. Notions of equality for its own sake—economic or social—are typically shunned. Freedom is commonly stressed. Often tradition as a source of wisdom is upheld; this is especially true of social conservatives. On the other hand, champions of "unfettered free enterprise" often turn out to be social revolutionaries, which in established political parties can lead to serious conflicts with their social conservative allies.

Very often the local social situation can shape the form of Left or Right opinion. The Left in the United States and most of the world, for instance, is anti-nationalist, taking the view that nationalism is an anti-progressive force. In Canada, on the other hand, the Left is highly nationalistic, adopting the view that it must protect Canada from American encroachment, which will lead to the undermining of its progressive institutions such as national health care. Multiculturalism, to cite another example, is a prominent cause for the Left in the United States. However, the Left in Canada is somewhat ambivalent, since it puts all cultures on a par, thereby undermining the special claim of Quebec (which the Canadian Left supports) in their struggle to maintain the French language and a separate culture in a sea of English-speakers.

At this point, I need to put forward and surface my own assumptions and philosophical and political stance. My position, although evolving over time, reflects a Canadian liberalism which differs in practice from the American view of "liberal." My own form of liberalism (in brief) suggests that there must be a reasonable combination of governmental influence and individual freedoms. In Canada, this is often referred to as a "left of center" approach. Through democratic

process, government must take an active role in progressing the ideal of a socially just society. This can take many forms. For example, government must take an active role and mitigate the negative influences when, for example, economic recession occurs and workers are disproportionately negatively affected. Health care must be universal and free to all citizens. Higher education must be wholly public and access must be based equitably. There can be no such thing as a totally free market. Some goods and services must be monitored or controlled by government to ensure for not only economic but social progress as well. In this view, goods such as electricity or fuel can be seen as "essential" economic and social goods whose price needs to be determined or monitored by democratic government. This can take the form of intrusive economic policy like wage and price controls. In sum, all aspects of private and public influence must be taken into consideration and combined to produce the ongoing goal of a socially just society.

This gives some idea of the spectrum of opinion and some idea of why we can't be precise in characterizing Left and Right. But if we say that for the Left, social and economic equality are paramount, we won't go too far wrong. And how social and economic equality relate to curriculum and educational policy issues is the fundamental question.

Over the past couple of decades, critical theory of education has encompassed a wide perspective including analyses of class interest and so-called cultural hegemony in schools. Disclosures of widespread injustice and inequity within various facets of school practice (including areas such as tracking, special education and teacher education) have proliferated. Critical theorists have also stressed, among other things, the power of individual initiative, the recognition of human intention, the masking of commonsense assumptions as ideology, the description of social-control mechanisms in schools (e.g. pupil testing as a form of surveillance, special education as a covert form of social control), and the general assumption that society is marked by conflicting interests of class, gender, and culture (Gibson, 1986).

Critical theory of education is often given its "birthplace" within the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany. The main premise of these early researchers was to encourage more radical forms of inquiry and thereby refute common assumptions of positivism. According to this group, the act of theorizing had been usurped by the positivist's tendency to treat reality with a system of rationality that had no moral commitment and no method of self-criticism. Thus positivist thought always failed to criticize the status quo and inevitably supported existing systems of powers (Horkheimer, 1972).

Apple prefers to broaden the definition from "critical theory" to "critical educational studies." It includes Marxist and neo-Marxist work but also a multitude of other perspec-

tives including feminist analyses, critical cultural studies and many others. The key point here, according to Apple, is that critical theory has evolved from an attempt to link through the relationship between culture, forms of domination, and society, and included attempts to think through cultural/political analysis of capitalist mass culture to the analysis of "technical knowledge and cognitive interests as forms of domination such as work done by Habermas in his discussions of system, life-world, communication and legitimation" (Apple, 2001b, viii).

I now want to turn to examining Apple's writings in the context of Leftist ideology. Hlebowitsh (1993) offers a good starting point in which to determine themes that run through the spectrum of critical theory.

- The struggle against common sense and rationality.
- Repression is the price paid for civilization.
- The abhorrence of prescription and imposition and informed practice by revealing ideological grounded action.
- The transformation of school and society.
- The need to escape from the forces of rationality and the methods of science.
- The issue of the hidden curriculum.

The remainder to this paper will take these themes and apply them to Apple's work. I have selected what Apple himself describes as his most significant "quadrivium" of work: *Ideology and Curriculum* (1979), *Education and Power* (1982), *Teachers and Texts* (1986), and *Official Knowledge* (Apple, 2000) as well as his latest work, *Educating the "Right" Way* (2001). It is the purpose of this paper to examine Apple's work not only as a writer within the critical theory community but also his own evolution of a writer in educational curriculum and policy.

There are those who argue that critical theory puts forward criticism itself as theory (Tanner & Tanner, 1979). Although critical theory might be valuable in ways of critique, it generally fails to provide a methodology or rationale that could be used as an alternative to ameliorate the condition(s) it seeks to improve (or destroy). There has been much written on the usefulness or practicality of any educational research to the practitioner. Although not an entirely true assumption for all studies in education, critical theory, in particular, has been noted as being too abstract, too vague and totally lacking in practical application. Without putting too fine a point on it, Hlebowitsh (1993) writes:

Their (i.e. critical theorists) orientation is entirely abstract, however, containing no procedural guidance on how to give life to educative experiences. To teachers, whom they frequently cast as unthinking agents of capitalist interests, they give no specific counsel about actual undertakings in the classroom; they give only generalized "strategies" of counterhegemony, consciousness raising, and emancipatory action. The teacher's

thinking can be informed only by the spirit of critical theory; there is no problem-focused design (p. 9).

Since critical theory is, by its very nature, anti-positivistic, all what is assumed is to be challenged or questioned or resisted. As Hlebowitsh (1993) details: "What might be regarded as true or rational is more or less an open question, part and parcel of a dialectical process that necessitates continuing oppositional thought. The world is not as we see it, and the day-to-day affairs of life cannot be entrusted to habit, routine, rule, custom, or reason" (pp. 5-6).

Apple's early work gives much consideration to the idea of "analyzing hegemony" in society. He argues that the "very categories we use to approach our responsibility to others, the commonsense rules we employ to evaluate the social practices that dominate our society, are often at issue" (Apple, 1979, 9). Moreover, the most critical of these categories are stated as "both our vision of 'science' and our commitment to the abstract individual" (p. 9). I discuss the idea of "science and methodology" later on in the paper. Most of Apple's ideological stance derives from his own neo-Marxist perspective where our "understanding of commonsense" is connected between what ideas are considered "real knowledge in a society and the inequality of economic and cultural power in advanced industrial societies" (Apple 1979, 154). Apple himself wants to distance what he considers the Marxist interpretation by some as the "conspiracy theory" (i. e. the intent of a small powerful elite to conspiring to control and suppress the lower classes) to a "constitutive framework of ideology and curriculum that has 'naturally' generated out of the productive relations among individuals and social groups that will be the principles, ideas and categories that conform to and support these unequal productive relations" (Apple, 1979, 155).

Apple does not directly refer to "commonsense" until much later in his writings. And his reference in *Official Knowledge* does indicate some allowance that power and the use of power can be seen in both the negative and positive light:

It (power) of course can be used to dominate, to impose ideas and practices on people in undemocratic ways. Yet it also signifies the concrete and material ways all of us attempt to build institutions that respond to our more democratic needs and hopes. This is particularly the case for power relations that exist at the level of the "popular" and at the level of commonsense. It is "common-sense" that partly legitimates what the Right is currently doing... (Apple, 2000, 5).

I believe Apple has also begun to accept that the reason why conservative forces are "winning the day" in terms of educational control and direction, is in part, due to the influence of Sokal and the inability of the Left to put forward an easily interpreted view to the general public of where curriculum

and education *should* be heading. And this, in part, should be based on solid, historical research:

We have been much too abstract in our attempts to analyze the role of education in the maintenance and subversion of social and cultural power....what seems to be the pursuit of theory for its own sake...we have abandoned the problems of concrete historical analysis (Apple, 2000, 16).

In any civilized society, the idea of control (social, economic, political) is a necessity for continued, orderly existence and even progress. However, critical theory interprets this "repression" as the price to be paid (by the oppressed) for continued civilization. But some Marxist and neo-Marxist writers such as Marcuse and Foucault argue there is "surplus repression" by way of, for example, "surveillance," that manifests itself through our economic, social and political institutions. For example, workers believe that their own survival rests with perpetuating the success of "the system," which in turn, is the very mechanism that continues to exploit and oppress them. Given this "repression," critical theorists mandate an "escape" which can be found (as aforementioned) in the dialectic: in the active pursuit of questioning, challenging and resisting *everything* that is postulated as "truth or reason" (Hlebowitsh, 1993).

As Apple (1979) devotes an entire chapter to the issue of "social control" in *Ideology and Curriculum*, it is only possible to highlight certain key points. First, Apple maintains that "schools do not only control people; they also help control meaning" (p. 63). This controlling of meaning is manifested upon the "subjected" by the more powerful groups in the larger political and economic arena. Since schools are interconnected with other more powerful political, economic and cultural institutions, an unequal balance is presented:

...schools exist through their relations to other more powerful institutions, institutions that are combined in such a way as to generate structural inequalities of power and access to resources...through their curricular, pedagogical and evaluative activities in day-to-day life in classrooms, schools play a significant role in preserving if not generating these inequalities (p. 64).

What is of issue to most (to borrow a phrase) readers might be where Apple derives his evidence for which "institutions" in particular, are tacitly out to repress and control the "lower classes." It appears that Apple is indulging in rhetorical justification rather than describing evidence for his claims here.

Critical theory advocates for educators to examine their own actions, thoughts and rationales and justify their own deep-held assumptions. In fact, critical theory suggests that educators must ask "awkward and disturbing" questions regarding long-held assumptions that have, over time, become

"rationalized as common sense." There is, therefore, *no* phenomenon or situation that can ever claim objectivity (Hlebowitsh, 1993).

In *Education and Power*, Apple argues that asking critical questions is not enough. He goes on further to espouse that "counter hegemonic" forces are being built and are growing. It is interesting to note for the first 173 pages of the book, there is much discussion of *what* is going on in terms of power relations between power elites and various affected groups. This includes ideas such as cultural reproduction, hidden curriculum and technical control of teachers to name a few. However, Apple only denotes less than four pages to detail what "concrete, practical work" needs to be done. Vague notions such as helping labor "recapture its lost traditions" and the important role labor activists, university teachers and others have in building a group of "intellectuals who are organic members of the subordinate classes" (Apple, 1982, 174). I'm not really sure, however, what an "organic member" is, much less what it is supposed to *do*.

Just as schools assert forms of social control on students, there too exists, by critical theorists, a control by way of a "hidden curriculum" that manifests itself in the form of "latent outcomes." Dewey refers to this idea as collateral learning. Dewey was interested in how attitudinal and contextual learning occurs outside the school setting and how both the learning within school and external environment interact with each other. However, *unlike* critical theorists, Dewey saw both the positive and negative impacts of collateral learning and believed that collateral learning should be something that must be included within the curriculum. Critical theory tends to view all collateral learning as forms of indirect control and oppression because they take place within a society that is controlled by powerful hegemonic forces and it is incumbent upon critical theory to "expose" this curriculum so that awareness and resistance can occur (Hlebowitsh, 1993).

I would argue that, although the critical theory and Marxist literature on the hidden curriculum is quite voluminous, it has made relatively little impact on educational policy and practioners. Practioners and non-practioners alike would seem to have little or no knowledge of a hidden curriculum in schools. Some may, on a surface level only, have some insight into concepts such as "cultural reproduction" or the process by way schools reinforce and determine class inequalities. But most of these principles tend to be "dumbed-down" and offered as neat packages to practioners that offer little in the way of a better understanding, and, more important, their useful applicability in a school setting.

Apple argues in *Education and Power* (1982) that policy makers and school planners do not have a "conspiracy theory" or covert plan they are working with, but rather, that the critical theory and Marxist literature on the hidden curriculum

proceeds from an "overly restricted view of socialization" (p. 64). By removing this idea of scheming and "nefarious planning" which is sometimes associated with the hidden curriculum, Apple provides a catalyst for looking at one's previous stance.

Students do resist the school's attempts at control through cultural challenges to that control. Thus when students try to get out of class, smoke or violate other rules in an effort to disrupt the educational process, Apple argues that they are resisting the overt curriculum as a way of resisting the hidden curriculum (Osborne, 1997).

Not only does Apple view curriculum as hidden; it is also arrogant. Apple tries to put the September 11 terrorist attack on the United States in some sort of educational context:

We have an arrogant curriculum. I would love to see in our math books, as an example, the fact that much of the math we actually have comes from Arabic roots. I'd love to see more history to show that much of the science, math, architectural principles come from northern Africa and Asia. I think we have to go a long way to get rid of the racist nativism and arrogance that goes on in the US curriculum (Pace, 2002, 36).

Since school and society are under "hegemonic control," critical theory mandates that only by dissent and resistance, can individuals be able to transform society to a more "caring" and, thereby, a more "existentially aware individual." Since school attempts and succeeds in reproducing cultural, economic, political and social "norms," "emancipation" by individuals is the only way people can re-assert their own control and destiny over their own lives. This idea, of course, transcends school itself and is imbedded in the technical rationality that "allegedly prevails among the determiners of school policy and practice" (Hlebowitsh, 1993, 8).

Just as individuals must somehow "escape" from the hegemonic control asserted in schools, critical theorists also argue for individuals to resist the "forces of rationality" and become more wary of the "methods of rationality." Critical theory advances the idea that science and the use of the scientific method invariably is a mask for the "dominant ideology" of the power elite. For example, special education's real purpose is not to help remediate learning difficulties in children but rather is seen as a "covert" attempt to sort and slot students (particularly minority students) into a "predicable," low, socioeconomic life. This "placement" of special education students is seen by critical theorists as being "rationalized" by scientific test scores and other research findings and data (Hlebowitsh, 1993).

In his earlier work, Apple argues much for the "hegemonic control" of the language or "linguistic system" of science. He offers three main considerations:

First, the language of science offers a mode of description that seems more powerful than previous ways of talking about educational events and policy, a way of describing both the relationship between schools and the problems of society and describing what went on or should go on in classrooms. Second, it is an explanatory language that seems as if it can establish causes and infer reasons to why things occur or do not occur in and out of schools. Third, and most important, the language of science gives the promise of better control, giving educators a greater ease of prediction and manipulation (Apple, 1979, 78-9).

Other examples of "hegemonic control" occur when school "systems" rationalize curriculum and teaching. Pre-packaged curricula (particularly in science) takes the form of deskilling teachers, limiting their autonomy and leading teachers to further "proletarianization." These are all interconnected ideas with further complicating factors such as how latent controls perpetuate class and gender inequalities (Apple, 1986).

Just as Apple questions the applicability of science and scientific research, he has lately begun to acknowledge the importance of varied research methodologies in leftist literature:

Currently on the terrain of legitimate research, there is ethnographic (both descriptive and critical), critical historical work and there is much greater emphasis on conceptual work, narrative work, on life histories, analyses based on cultural studies...add to this the multiple kinds of feminist research, post-colonial research, critical disability studies, critical race theory, critical discourse analysis...I think we have made impressive gains. (Apple, 2001b, vii).

The problem here, however, is that he fails to describe where or how these "gains" have taken place.

However, Apple does realize that these "emerging perspectives lead to fragmentation." "There has been an accompanying growth of 'private' languages and of esoteric ways of expressing our theories, which only specialists in a small area can understand. Thus, while the growth of multiple research perspectives has been for the good, one of the dangers has been that it has gotten harder for generally progressive researchers to communicate with each other easily" (Apple, 2001b, xvii).

Not only has leftist writing become "fragmented" and read by a select few in their respective research interests, Apple also sees the need for a more rigorous application of research methodology by the left if they are ever going to gain public favor and limit the influence of the conservative agenda in education today:

I am not arguing that quantitative research is unimportant. Nor am I arguing against the use of the best of statistical

social and psychological perspectives. To be honest, I am coming to think that critical researchers and activists have actually participated in their own deskilling by labeling any quantitative work as 'polluted'. This has been a disaster in some ways, since it often leaves critical work at a disadvantage when public debates occur. Think of the book *The Bell Curve* by Herrnstein and Murray that tried to show that, genetically, Blacks were on average inferior to Whites... Not only was the volume fundamentally racist and sexist, it was statistically horribly flawed... In public debates, the authors were able to make their case into a seemingly more powerful one because few critical scholars actually were able to show how badly done it was empirically as well" (Apple, 2001b, xviii).

Apple and other Marxist writers hold that social problems stem from class conflict. There is a great deal of truth in this—yet it can't be the whole story. A number of social problems are greatly exacerbated by class conflict, but do not wholly arise from it. Would racism and sexism disappear if class conflict ended? Not likely. Racism and sexism seem to have a life of their own. How might science (education) itself fare in a more democratic society? Would it change it for the better?

In numerous writings Hilary Rose and Sephen Rose have made the case for a more democratic science along Marxist lines. Their claim seems to be that we will have a more democratic science (and education) *when and only when* we have a more democratic (i.e. classless) society.

The questions we have to ask, in the long run, are: what sort of science do we want? How much of it do we want? Who should do it? How should they and their activities be controlled? But the fundamental question underlying all these activities is: What sort of society do we want? (Rose and Rose, 1970).

Marxist scientists (and Michael Apple, as well) are often deeply concerned with social problems, especially those connected with science. Their main consideration is that science is constrained under capitalism, but under socialism they believe it would flourish, and flourish in a way that genuinely serves society.

It's impossible not to sympathize with the view put forward by the Roses and other Marxist writers, but it's also impossible to find it wholly believable. Like racism and sexism, undemocratic aspects of science seem to have a life of their own. It will take more than a change in society toward social and economic equality to bring about the desired changes in science itself. Moreover—and this is surely the crucial point—we can't wait for a more democratic society. Changing science for the better now might even help to promote a more democratic society in the future.

Apple appears to be moving away from writing about curricular issues, to ideas that more encapture what is going

on today in terms of educational policy. Apple maintains that the most important issue by far is the conservative "restoration or modernization." This is seen as a new alliance that will influence practical and policy issues in education for a long time to come. This new alliance of what Apple defines as four groups that are held together by tenuous and contradictory tendencies. This new alliance is what Apple calls the "new hegemonic bloc" (Apple, 2001b).

The first group are the neo-liberals who are economic modernizers who want educational policy to be centered around the economy. Schools are seen as in need of being transformed and made more competitive by placing them into marketplaces through voucher plans, and tax credits. The second group are neo-conservatives whose main agenda is cultural "restoration" and a return to Western values and morals through national or state-mandated curricula and testing. The third group are the authoritarian religious populists. This group want a return to what they believe is the Biblical tradition as the basis of knowledge, sacred texts and sacred authority. The fourth group does not see itself as having an ideological agenda as the previous three. This group is made up of the new professional and middle class. They are often employed by the state to provide technical knowledge in the form of testing, management and efficiency. Their technical expertise allows the neo-conservatives and neo-liberals to go forward with their ideas of fiscal and educational accountability (Apple, 2001a).

Much of what Apple talks about in *Educating the "Right" Way*, reflects, I believe, his evolution as a scholar within the leftist "community." Both this work and his previous book (*Official Knowledge*) contain much more narrative accounts of real students and teachers and others directly involved in the day-to-day life of schools. This more pragmatic approach appeals not only to the educational practitioner (and if there is to be any meaningful, socially progressive change, teachers *must* be at the forefront) but to the general readership. Although not devoid of theoretical underpinnings, Apple has purged much of his Stalinoid jargon that appeared regularly in his earlier work. Could episodes such as the fall of communist (Marxist) Soviet Union in 1990-1991 and the "Sokal Affair" have anything to do with this new found clarity of expression? Or is it a realization that since "the right" has done such a good job of providing the general public a version of its agenda by way of a "commonsense" dialogue that is neither arrogant nor overly negative? I would offer that it might be a combination of both.

I began this paper with the "Sokal Hoax" and here is where I want to end. Sokal performed a great service; not only in showing that the postmoderns, neo-Marxists and other social constructivists are hopelessly confused and tacitly arrogant, but in opening up some elbow room for allowing (and perhaps determining) better writing and writers from the Left

to emerge. An email correspondence that I had with Michael Apple confirms some of this belief:

Since the 1980's, well before the Social Text fiasco, I have consistently argued that the left in education has to write in a manner that is less arrogant. Indeed, as someone who was one of the members of the Social Text collective when it was formed, this is something I argued with other members of the Social Text community then (M. Apple, personal communication, December, 2002).

Educational theory and research should be the friend of the oppressed. Yet it must appear to many that educational theory and research is part of the problem. We are regularly bombarded with "discoveries" of some gene or other that invariably seems to explain why the poor have little and the rich are doing so well. Can you imagine *Time* magazine running a cover story: "Scientists discover the socialism gene."? Fat chance. But there was a cover story on *The Bell Curve*, and it contributed, no doubt, to a widespread feeling that the current social order is perfectly natural, with the races and classes located just where they belong.

A way to facilitate a better and wider audience for education that is more progressive and socially just is to improve upon the way some Leftist writers conduct their analysis. Again, I offer a recent correspondence I had with Apple:

In *Educating the "Right" Way*, I argue that we need to become much more skilled in qualitative as well as quantitative analysis. In my newest book, *The State and the Politics of Knowledge* (due out in Spring, 2003 from Routledge), I argue strongly that evidence—quantitative, qualitative, historical, etc.—counts and that too often postmodern scholars act as if evidence is either unnecessary or beside the point and that all one needs is rhetorical justification (M. Apple, personal communication, December, 2002).

I believe that Apple's work has evolved from a more theoretical, structuralist—Marxist interpretation of education and inherent equality, to one that genuinely tries to aim for a greater, wider readership. Books like *Educating the "Right" Way* (2001) and *Official Knowledge* (2000) have less of the "rhetorical justification" and more narrative and historical analysis. Earlier works have come under some deserved criticism as being too abstract and pointing out the oppressive interactions of all things cultural, economic, political and educational and yet doing next to nothing in forming how we go about changing or getting to the alternatives he postulates. Nevertheless, I believe as Apple further writes to a wider audience, he takes his place and does his part in bringing to the public's attention, the problems in education today. To this point, I say we should challenge our local politicians, or economists or bureaucrats who are responsible for poor educational policy to public debate. We should write popular

articles for our local newspapers and international magazines, anything with a wide readership. One article in a major magazine will find a wider readership than a lifetime of publications in regular academic journals.

In a true democracy, it is the people, of course, that need to hear more intelligent, clear and informed voices. If Sokal's hoax prods those who are analytically minded and sympathetic to equality in schools into socially constructive action, then that will be his true legacy.

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